

FINAL ACTION
ON THE
Question of Government
OF THE
Retreat for the Insane
AT
HARTFORD, CONN.,
WITH
Letters of Endorsement.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE USE.

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To the Board of Directors of the Retreat for the Insane :

GENTLEMEN,—I have the honor respectfully to acknowledge the receipt of the official answer of the Board of Directors, written by order and in behalf of the Board of Managers, in response to my communication addressed to the Board of Directors on the 4th of November, ult., wherein I asked to be informed as to whether I should be guided by the present By-Laws in the future.

I accepted the grave responsibility of Superintendent of the Retreat, under a code of By-Laws as a guide and a basis of government, which unqualifiedly and plainly stated verbatim, that the Superintendent should "*take charge of the Institution,*" and that to him should be confided "*the control of all persons therein.*"

I accepted the position, also, trusting the unusually emphatic statement of the Directors, made and recorded March 19th, 1840, that the By-Laws of the Retreat were designed "to place the Government of the Institution entirely under the control of the Superintendent." I knew, however, very well, that there had always been jarring and discord, referable to a division of authority in the management of the Retreat, generally recognized by Superintendents of similar institu-

tions, and characterized in 1841, by the late Dr. Luther V. Bell, an eminent Superintendent of the McLean Asylum, in a published report on government of Insane Asylums, as "troubles at Hartford, arising from clashing of authority." I requested, as you are aware, such a revision of our By-Laws as would plainly particularize the "entire control" of the Superintendent, so as to preclude the possibility of similar perilous dissensions during my Superintendency.

On the 6th of June, ult., I received, in response, the following votes, viz :

"*Voted*, that in the judgment of this Board, it is inexpedient to make any alteration in the By-Laws in regard to the management of the affairs of the Retreat."

"*Voted*, to appoint Dr. E. K. Hunt, Wm. R. Cone, and J. B. Bunce, a committee to consider the expediency of any further change in the By-Laws, to report at a meeting of the Board to be held June 9th."

I had presumed, until the 27th of October, ult., that that committee might be about to offer a deliberate report, in accordance with an apparently legitimate request submitted by myself, that ample time should be taken to discuss the subject. At that date I was informed by the Vice-President of the Board, in answer to my inquiry, that another vote had also been passed in addition to those already communicated to me, in final reply to my request for a revision of the By-Laws.

I was assured, besides, that I was (of course) entitled to receive an official copy thereof. Having therefore addressed a letter to the Secretary of the Board,

asking for an official copy, I received, November 1st, ult., the following answer: * * * "At the meeting of the Directors, held on the 9th day of June, it was '*Voted*, that the committee be discharged and the Board adjourn.'"

I wrote directly to you, *Gentlemen of the Board of Directors*, requesting information as to whether that vote was intended to be considered as finally disposing of the question of Revision of the By-Laws, in accordance with the officially expressed propositions on the Government of Insane Asylums, adopted by the Association of Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane.

I asked also to be instructed, if such were the fact, as to whether I, as *the head* of the Retreat, should be governed by the present By-Laws, which had received *no official modification whatever*.

In official response, I received your final answer on the 13th of November, ult., written "in behalf of *the Board of Managers, and by their order*," stating that "that action was designed to be final, and that the present By-Laws, as understood and explained by the *Board of Managers*, in their communication upon the subject, of December 16th, 1872, will of course be your (my) guide in the future."

That communication, explanation, or revision, which was declared to have had "*no official binding force*" by the Board of Managers, became the official guide to the By-Laws on the 13th of November, ult.

This explanation excepts from the entire control of the Superintendent those persons whose duties are de-

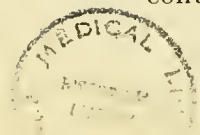
fined by the By-Laws, and declares "that if those persons performed faithfully and well all the duties which the By-Laws required of them, then their whole duty was done, and they owed no further obedience to the Superintendent."

Should such appointees decide not only that the duties which they performed were those which the By-Laws required, but that those duties were well performed, or should they persistently refuse to perform their proper duties, it is said that "the Superintendent has no power to enforce his requirements," but that upon proper representation, *the Directors* "would exercise that power." The independent power of arbitration in government is the essential signification of "entire control."

In another contingency of similar kind, it is stated that "the *Board of Managers* would, upon proper representations, (which would involve personal and undignified dissension.) "endeavor to meet the complaint."

The management of domestics and attendants is given, however, to the Superintendent, whereas the control of most important concerns and interests is exclusively entrusted to still another officer.

This decision of the Board annuls the authority of the Superintendent, as understood by myself when I accepted the position, and by the framers of the By-Laws, under which I accepted it, who emphatically stated that the By-Laws were intended to give the Superintendent entire (not a less than one fourth part) control of the government of the Institution. It is



contrary to the Propositions of the Association of Superintendents, which accord complete control to the executive officer; it is in direct variance with the expressed opinions of the President, the Ex-Presidents, and many eminent members of that organization, as well as of other distinguished gentlemen. I cheerfully recognize however, the right of the Directors to be an authority unto themselves in deciding such questions of government. I have only adduced other opinions to show that I was not proceeding without the sanction of generally recognized authorities. I candidly believe that I cannot attain any established success in the management of the affairs of the Retreat under the guidance of the By-Laws, as now officially explained.

I believe also, that the struggle of an attempt to succeed properly, could not long be maintained under such circumstances, without peril to my professional reputation.

The Retreat is to-day prosperous, in so far as the character of its patients is rapidly improving—socially considered,—and its average annual income is greater, by \$13,959.92, than at any previous time, so that no embarrassment on that account influences me; but in view of the considerations adduced *alone*, I unhesitatingly, yet regretfully, present herewith to the Board of Directors my resignation of the office of Superintendent of the Retreat. I need not reiterate the statement that no personal sentiment or dissension whatever, is involved. My relations with all associated officers of the Institution, and with all officially connected with it, are, and have been, amicable.

During the time which may intervene until the appointment of my successor, so long as it may be requisite, I shall with, I need not say, complete loyalty as heretofore, perform the duties of Physician. Believing that the functions of a Superintendent cannot be properly exercised, I respectfully decline to act other than as Resident Physician.

My resignation, which I desire should date from the 13th of November, ult., has been deferred until I could present with it such letters as are herewith enclosed, as would demonstrate that I am not acting without the sanction of those who are generally accepted in this country as authorities on such questions among gentlemen of this special part of the profession.

I remain respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES H. DENNY,

RESIDENT PHYSICIAN,

Retreat, Hartford, Ct., December 16, 1873.

GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE, NEAR
Washington, D. C., Dec. 13, 1873.

JAMES H. DENNY, *Resident Physician,*
Retreat for the Insane, Hartford, Conn.

Dear Doctor,—I have your communication dated November 24, 1873, in which, after copious extracts both from the By-Laws of the Retreat relating to the powers and duties of the Superintendent and from a communication addressed to you by the Board of Managers, and subsequently confirmed by their superiors, the Directors, interpreting and defining the force and operation of those By-Laws which affect the relations between the Superintendent and the other officers and employes of the institution, you request me, as President of the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane, to inform you “whether, in view of all the circumstances detailed, I (you) could retain the position of Superintendent of the Retreat, and still be in accord with the official sentiments of the Association, and, if not, whether you (I) endorse my (your) resignation.”

It seems to me proper that I should at once say that the Association of Superintendents has not authorized the President of that body to express its views upon any question in relation to hospital management, and I am not willing that the opinions that I shall express in compliance with your request should be considered as carrying with them the authority of the Association, or as entitled to any more weight than those of any other American Superintendent, whose

field of labor and experience has been as extended as my own.

With that explanation, I have no hesitation in saying that, in my opinion, the interpretation of the force and operation of the By-Laws of the Retreat, given in the communication from the Board of Managers to the Superintendent, to which reference has been made, is not "in accordance with the official sentiments of the Association," as set forth in a series of Propositions relating to the Organization of Hospitals for the Insane, which were adopted in 1853, and have been ever since, and are now, I believe, as they were then, the "unanimous sentiments of the Association on the subjects referred to." I am also clearly of the opinion that the By-Laws of the Retreat, as "explained" by the Board of Managers of that institution, are not only in direct contravention to the views of the Association, but that under the operation of those By-Laws, as there interpreted, no Superintendent can give his patients all the possible benefits of hospital or asylum treatment, or adequately discharge the high responsibilities he assumes in taking the insane under his charge, away from their homes, and the personal observations and care of their friends.

The personal reputation of the Superintendent, and the credit and usefulness of the institution he conducts, must also suffer, in their growth and development, if not in positive impairment, under the restricted discretion and powers of the head of the institution as they are defined by the Managers.

Having answered your first inquiry in the affirma-

tive, the contingency has arisen in which you ask an answer to your second inquiry. The Propositions relating to the Organization of Institutions for the Insane were put forth as the opinions of the Association upon questions of vital moment to the insane, but their adoption in practice by any hospital or asylum was not made a condition upon which the chief medical officer of such an institution should become or remain a member of that body. It follows that a Superintendent does not forfeit his membership nor render himself subject to dismissal by retaining his connection with an institution whose managers do not see fit to be governed in framing their By-Laws by the Propositions. Indeed, the Superintendent of an institution organized in accordance with your By-Laws, as explained by your Managers, would, I think, be considered in full sympathy with the Association, and enjoy the respect and esteem of his fellows, if he should continue to make every effort in his power to have the By-Laws revised and made to accord with the Propositions, and by his personal exertions under such adverse circumstances secure a fairly successful and comfortable treatment of his patients. As far as the Association is concerned, then, I do not think your membership of it requires you to resign, and if the Association was in session and you should propound to it the same inquiries that you have propounded to me, I think it would hesitate to go further than to reiterate its views in regard to the proper organization and management of institutions for the insane, and advise you to retire from your charge whenever you found yourself seriously hindered in affording your patients

such care and treatment as their friends might reasonably expect, and as required by the science and philanthropy of the day.

The question of resigning or retaining such a place as yours, is, I think, one of individual discretion and judgment. In your case, you can judge better than any one else can, what prospect there is of a change in accordance with your views and those of the Association, how much independence and inefficiency on the part of those who should be your subordinates you can submit to without discouragement, apathy and inefficiency on your own part, and what personal necessities exist to induce you to endure for a time evils that you cannot cure. You can also estimate better than I or any one else can do for you, how far the course pursued by the Board of Managers is a violation of the faith upon which you accepted the place of Superintendent, and whether a proper self-respect requires you to resign your position. If you conclude to resign, my individual judgment will certainly approve the act, and if you remain in your place for the present, I shall not doubt that you have sufficient reasons for that course, and you will not suffer in my esteem.

Whether you remain at the Retreat or not, I hope you will continue to devote yourself to the specialty, not doubting that you will sooner or later meet with an opening for a career of great usefulness and distinction.

Truly and Faithfully Yours,

C. H. NICHOLS,

*President of the Association of Medical Superintendents
of American Institutions for the Insane.*

PENNSYLVANIA HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE,
Philadelphia, Dec. 1, 1873.

My Dear Doctor,—Your letter is conclusive. I do not see how you could consistently adopt any other course than that you propose. I am not willing to believe that the Managers can allow the Retreat to be so far behind other institutions in its regulations, or lose a good officer for doing what is right.

Very Truly Yours,

THOMAS S. KIRKBRIDE.

3509 BARING ST., PHILADELPHIA.
27th Nov., 1873.

My Dear Doctor,—I regret exceedingly that you find yourself obliged, by a proper sense of self respect, and a proper regard for the honor of your profession, to relinquish the position you now hold.

I thought you possessed certain qualities of mind and temper that peculiarly fitted you for its duties, and that under your direction the old institution would continue to maintain its honorable place among the establishments of our country devoted to the relief of suffering humanity. But much as I regret this step, I cannot blame you for concluding to go no further unless you could see a fair field before you, with all the conditions necessary to the highest measures of success.

You do wisely, therefore, in retiring from a position where you would be hampered by laws and regulations likely to disturb your peace of mind and make you fall short of that degree of excellence for which I know you would aim.

A hospital for the insane requires the services of a considerable number of persons who, however diverse their employment or grade of office, are all engaged in the promotion of a common end, viz: the highest welfare of the patients. It is necessary, therefore, that they should act in harmony, and this they never will do unless constantly controlled and animated by a common head, whose plans and purposes embrace all the conditions, therapeutic, pathological, hygienic and social, of success.

Of course there must be divisions of duty, a distribution of trust, but it is a duty and distribution that should always be accompanied by subordination. Separate and independent powers inevitably lead to collisions, jealousies, heart-burnings, disputes and resignations, for the simple reason that it is impossible to define their respective limits very exactly.

Let the supremacy of the Superintendent be acknowledged and felt in every branch of the service, there remains no occasion for such effects.

Your Boards are apprehensive, I suppose, that such concentration of power is liable to be abused, but were the apprehension well founded, it might, at the very worst, be the lesser evil of the two. But as a matter of fact, where, among the forty or fifty hospitals in our country in which the Superintendent is supreme, do

we witness a systematic abuse of power? I am personally acquainted with the working of many of them, and I can truly say, as the result of my observations, that wherever such supremacy has been most firmly established in the usages of the institution, there I have seen the most striking exhibition of mutual respect, confidence and co-operation.

Disagreeable and painful as this step must be to you, I trust that the motives that have led to it will be better appreciated in some other place, and that the public may yet receive the benefit of your labors in this, your chosen branch of our profession.

Yours Truly,

I. RAY.

DR. J. H. DENNY.

NO. 7 NEWBURY STREET,
Boston, Dec. 1, 1873.

My Dear Doctor,—I do not intend that what I write shall be considered by you as *advice*,—for you alone can weigh all the peculiar circumstances of your own position.

But after the most careful consideration of the whole subject, with no haste and with no special persons or object in view, the matter was settled at Somerville, and always adhered to, in order to secure a harmonious working of the multifarious elements of hospital life, and this great object was thus secured.

The Trustees under the charter are supreme. The

next officer is the Superintendent, and all other officers, steward, matron, assistant physicians, attendants, farmers, etc., should be chosen only by his nomination, and removed in the same way, but they should be reached by the Trustees through the Superintendent. Thus, as in army life, while all power is with the General, he reaches a subordinate through his intermediate officers.

In my belief, it is as much for the *interest* and *comfort* of the Directors to adopt this plan, as it is *indispensable* for the well working of the organization, and it certainly is more dignified.

Both plans have been fully tried. The one always succeeds, and succeeds comfortably. The other is always begetting frictions, misunderstandings and petty annoyances, impairing the good feeling which ought to prevail, and giving meagre instead of full results of satisfaction, such as ought to be felt and are needed for a daily stimulus and strength by all who are engaged in hospital work.

My experience leads me to say that *I* would not accept nor hold the office of Superintendent under any other than the above conditions.

Yours Truly,

JOHN E. TYLER.

N. H. ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE.

Concord, Nov. 29, 1873.

My Dear Doctor,—Your letter of the 25th inst. is received, and I have carefully considered the situation in which you are placed as relates to the By-Laws of the Retreat, and the construction of them by the Board of Managers.

It would be the occasion of much regret to me to know of your resigning the position of Superintendent of the Retreat, where such a career of usefulness seems open before you, and I hope such an event may not occur until any other course is impracticable.

But, if the Directors of the Institution adopt their "construction" literally in practice, I see no way to avoid embarrassments so serious that any Superintendent would be sanctioned in declining to accept them. In any condition of human nature which *I* have yet seen, I should despair of seeing all the positions which the "Construction of the By-Laws" exempts from the control of the Superintendent so wisely filled as not seriously to interfere with the best and most successful execution by the Superintendent of the duties distinctly imposed upon him. I *still* believe that every part of the machinery of a Hospital for the Insane is inseparably interwoven with the moral treatment, and so far as any part of it is placed beyond the control of

the Physician-in-Chief, to that extent is liability to failure of the best results incurred.

Hoping still that any occasion for your vacating your office will not continue,

I am, Very Truly, Your Friend,

J. P. BANCROFT.

To J. H. DENNY, M. D., Hartford, Conn.

McLEAN ASYLUM, SOMERVILLE, MASS.,
Nov. 29, 1873.

DR. JAMES H. DENNY.

Dear Sir:—Your note of 27th inst., informing me of your proposed resignation of the office of Superintendent of the Retreat, was received last evening.

I regret exceedingly that you have found such a course necessary, but under the circumstances I cannot see how you could do anything else.

I believe that no institution can be thoroughly and successfully conducted unless every officer and employe is directly subordinate to the Superintendent, who in his turn should be subordinate only to the Board of Directors, and should by them be held responsible for the proper administration of every department.

Unless such relations exist between the Superintendent and the other officers that there is perfect

unanimity of action, I think that the welfare of the patients, and all the great interests of the institution must suffer.

In this institution the Superintendent has always been the one responsible officer, and you are aware that everything moves on smoothly, with no clashing, and that the relations of all the officers are mutually pleasant.

I think that your resignation, regretted though it must be, will meet the approval of all your brother Superintendents.

With my best wishes and kindest regards,

Very Truly Yours,

GEORGE F. JELLY, *Supt.*

CITY OF BOSTON,

CITY HOSPITAL, Dec. 5, 1873.

My Dear Doctor,—The true principles of hospital organization and government are so well established by experience, that there can be no doubt of the correctness of the Propositions relating to this matter, adopted by the Association of Superintendents.

The evils of the old system of managing institutions have been equally well demonstrated by its notable failure.

I am not therefore surprised at the course you have felt obliged to take. I believe that no one could

assume the grave responsibility of the charge of an Insane Asylum under such circumstances as must attend the division of authority peculiar to the old system, without subjecting himself and his management to perplexities and difficulties that might thwart his best endeavors. When the most essential conditions of success are thus lacking, there can be but little to induce one to enter upon so serious an undertaking.

I heartily sympathize with you in your desire to do that which will best promote the cause of good institutions, and with sincere good wishes,

I am, Very Truly, Your Friend,

EDWARD COWLES.

BOSTON, Nov. 27, 1873.

Dear Sir:—I cannot conceive of any other course left to you as an honorable man, than to resign your place of so-called “Superintendent” of the Asylum.

I cannot understand how any Asylum can be properly conducted in the way indicated and followed by those now having control of the Institution at Hartford.

It seems to me that such a course may often be fatal to the best interests of the patients, and I cannot see or imagine one valid reason for the present position of the governing bodies, unless they want to have a man

of inferior qualities, moral and intellectual, to fill the office of "Resident Physician" merely.

Yours Truly,

HENRY I. BOWDITCH.

DR. DENNY.

HEADQUARTERS DIVISION OF THE SOUTH,
Louisville, Ky., Dec. 4, 1873.

DR. JAMES H. DENNY, *Retreat, Hartford, Conn.*

My Dear Doctor,—I have just received, on my return from a short absence from headquarters, your letter of the 24th, telling me of your having resigned the office of Superintendent of the Hartford Retreat.

I have had so many associations connected with that Institution, and with you as a chief part of it, and am under so many obligations to it and to you, that the announcement of your separation from it has given me real pain. I had looked forward to your having a brilliant success there for years to come!

I do not doubt the Directors have acted in good faith, and I certainly have no right to question their acts, but as one who has a deep interest in such institutions, for the blessing the one at Hartford has proven to have been, I cannot but regard their decision as a great mistake, as a real calamity. I cannot conceive of government of any kind without a head, and that, of a nation, an army, a hospital, or a family, without that head is *one*, not *many*!

That your act in resigning will be approved by your brother Superintendents, and by all who, professionally or otherwise, are interested in Institutions for the Insane, except, perhaps, those connected with the Hartford Retreat, cannot, I think, be doubted, and I only hope some good Institution may secure the services of one so pre-eminently fitted for its head, as you have shown yourself to be. If I can be of any service, please command.

I am, as ever, my dear Doctor,

Your Sincere Friend,

IRWIN McDOWELL, *Maj. Gen.*



SUMMARY.

For convenience of reference and a readier appreciation of the subject discussed, the following summary of correspondence, &c., relative to the government of the Retreat, is presented.

Knowing that the By-Laws, which are the basis of government, accorded "entire control of all present" to the Superintendent, and that they were revised in order "to place the government of the Institution entirely under the control of the Superintendent," I did not hesitate *on that account* to accept the position.

I knew that there had always been trouble which "arose from a clashing of authority between the Medical head and the Steward." (See letter of the late Dr. Luther V. Bell, page 54, written in 1841.) My honored predecessor kindly informed me, and permits me to state that similar troubles, such as he had experienced, depended upon causes which would not be operative in event of my acceptance of the office of Superintendent. In order to avoid doubt I addressed a letter to the Board of Managers, Dec. 3d, 1872, asking for their construction of the By-Laws. I received a reply Dec. 16, 1872, disclaiming official authority, but explaining that certain officers and concerns were *not* under the control of the Superintendent, as the By-Laws stated. As the reply was unofficial, the question was next referred to the higher Board of Directors, May, 1873. In order to divest it even of the appear-

ancee of a personal character, it was presented in the form of a request for the "revision of the By-Laws upon the basis of the propositions relating to the government of hospitals for the insane, unanimously adopted by the association of Superintendents as the official expression of its sentiments thereupon."

The propositions specify the power of nomination and discharge as belonging to the Superintendent. An official copy of the reply of the Directors was received June 2d, 1873, namely :

"*Voted*, That in the judgment of the Board it is inexpedient to make alteration in the By-Laws in regard to the management of the affairs of the Retreat."

"*Voted*, To appoint Dr. E. K. Hunt, Wm. R. Cone and J. B. Bunee a committee to consider the expediency of any future change in the By-Laws, to report at a meeting of the Board to be held June 9th."

A communication was made to the Directors, June 6th, 1873, giving "reasons for considering the expediency of a revision of the By-Laws," and requesting that a committee be appointed to consider the question, and that *ample time* be taken to discuss the subject.

In accordance with that request—no answer having been returned—I *waited*, trusting that the question might be receiving the official deliberation which its importance justified.

In order to obtain the official response to which I was entitled, I addressed a note to the Secretary of the Board asking for a final answer—the question having been, as I legitimately supposed, left purposely am-

biguous, as indicated by the votes last received. A vote which had not previously been communicated to me was received in response on the 3d Nov., and the following note in acknowledgement was written, viz :

RETREAT, Nov. 4, 1873.

To the Directors of the Retreat for the Insane :

GENTLEMEN,—I have the honor respectfully to acknowledge the receipt, on the 3d inst., of the following copy of a vote passed June 9th, 1873, viz : “ *Voted*, That the committee be discharged and the Board adjourn,” in answer to my communication requesting a revision of the By-Laws. I respectfully request to be informed whether that action was designed to be final. If it was intended to dispose of the question finally, I respectfully ask to be informed whether I shall be governed by the present By-Laws in the future.

I remain, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JAMES H. DENNY.

The following decisive and official response was at last elicited :

HARTFORD, Conn., Nov. 13, 1873.

DR. JAMES H. DENNY, *Supt. &c., of the Retreat for the Insane.*

DEAR SIR,—Yours of the 4th, but post-marked the 7th inst., addressed to the Board of Directors of the Retreat, acknowledging the receipt of a vote passed June 9th, 1873, in which you ask to be informed whether that action was designed to be final, and if so,

whether you are to be guided by the present By-Laws in future, was received on the 10th inst.

The communication has been brought to the attention of the Board of Managers, and they have to reply that the matter has received full and careful attention, having been upon three, if not four, several occasions before the Managers and the Directors for their consideration and decision, and their action to which you refer was designed to be final, and that the present By-Laws, as understood and explained by the Board of Managers in their communication to you upon the subject, of Dec. 16, 1872, which was before the Directors in their deliberations and discussions, and in which they fully concurred, will, of course, be your guide in the future.

Very respectfully, in behalf of the Board of Managers,
and by their order,

WM. R. CONE,

Vice-Pres. of the Retreat, &c.

On the 16th of December my resignation was tendered, with letters from the President and members of the Association of Superintendents, according unanimous approval thereof, because the guide referred to "is not only in direct contravention of the views of the Association, but that under the operation of those By-Laws, as there interpreted, no Superintendent can adequately discharge the high responsibilities he

assumes. The personal reputation of the Superintendent, and the credit and usefulness of the institution he conducts, must also suffer * * * under the restricted discretion and power of the head of the Institution, as defined by the managers."

I believe that the course pursued by the Board of Directors "is a violation of the faith," upon which I "accepted the place of Superintendent, and that a proper self-respect requires" me to resign. having "made every effort" in my power "to have the By-Laws revised and made to accord with the propositions" of the Association without success.

(See letter of President of Association of Superintendents, &c.)

JAMES H. DENNY,

RESIDENT PHYSICIAN,

Retreat, Hartford, Ct., December, 1873.



